THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

of

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

presents

EXPLORATIONS

Sunday, March 7, 1976 at 8:00 p.m.

Convocation Hall, Arts Building

A SELECTION OF AMERICAN CHORAL MUSIC

Magnificat in C Major ..... Charles Theodore Pachelbel (1690-1750)

Lamentation Over Boston ..... William Billings (1746-1800)

Tenting Tonight ..... Walter Kittredge (arr. Leonard Van Camp)

God's Bottles ..... Randall Thompson (b. 1899)

Simple Gifts ..... Traditional (arr. Aaron Copland)

Psalms 67 ..... Charles Ives (1874-1954)

The University of Alberta Concert Choir
Larry Cook, conductor

TWO RHAPSODIES FOR OBOE, VIOLA AND PIANO (1905) ..... Charles Martin Loeffler (1861-1935)

(After Poems by Rollinat)

L'Etang
La Cornemuse

Dayna Fisher, oboe
Michael Bowie, viola
Janet Scott, piano

INTERMISSION

QUINTET, OPUS 34 (1864) ..... Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo
Andante, un poco Adagio
Scherzo—Allegro
Finale—Poco sostenuto—Allegro non troppo

The University of Alberta String Quartet

Thomas Rolston, violin — Michael Bowie, viola
Lawrence Fisher, violin — Claude Kenneson, cello
Isobel Moore, piano

PROGRAM NOTES

The choral selections on tonight's program were chosen in recognition of the American Bicentennial and each illustrates some particular aspect of American choral composition, although the group as a whole is in no way a representative historical survey. Charles Theodore Pachelbel (born in Stuttgart) was the son of Johann Pachelbel, the renowned south German composer who was also god-father to J.S. Bach's older sister. Charles settled in Boston around 1733 (later moving to Newport, New York, and finally to Charleston) and in early January and March of 1736 gave concerts in New York—the earliest documented concerts in that city. The **Magnificat,** for double choir, was included on those concerts.

William Billings was one of the first important native composers in the U.S., and was active as a music educator as well. He characteristically had the principal melody sung by the tenors, and some other parts duplicated at the octave resulting in a thick, full texture. The **Lamentation,** occasioned by the Boston "Massacre", is a clever paraphrase of Psalm 137 (By the waters of Babylon . . . "), the lament of the Israelites during the Babylonian captivity.

Without a doubt the best-known song to emanate from the American Civil War is the "Battle Hymn of the Republic". Another song, "Tenting Tonight", was almost equally popular in its time—and was sung by men on both sides of the conflict. Written in 1862 by Walter Kittredge, an otherwise obscure ballad singer, the sentimental ballad sold over 100,000 copies by the end of the war.

After the Civil War the next major disaster to descend upon the U.S. was prohibition. The text of "God's Bottles" is taken from a pamphlet issued by the National Women's Christian Temperance Union. The earnestness of the text and the whimsy of Thompson's musical setting (1932) combine to form an irresistable punch.

"Simple Gifts" is a folk-like song of the Shakers, formerly a small, religious sect in Pennsylvania. The melody was immortalized by Aaron Copland (b. 1900) in the ballet **Appalachian Spring** (1944) and re-used in his **Old American Songs** (1952). Recently the melody has also become associated with "The Lord of the Dance".

Charles Ives is often considered America's most individual and innovative composer, although his profession was not music; he was a successful insurance executive. The **Sixty-seventh Psalm,** written in 1898, begins with three-part treble voices in C Major, and three-part male voices in G Minor. A short fugal section in F Major follows (thus the whole first part could be considered an extended dominant-ninth to the fugato). The opening material returns, and the Psalm ends peacefully in chant style—still with both keys sounding to the very end.

—Larry D. Cook

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Charles Loeffler, an American of Alsatin birth, gives (in the words of Lawrence Gilman) "the truest account of his temperament when he is translating into music some poem of Verlaine or Beaudelaire filled with brooding menace and immitigable grief."

The **Two Rhapsodies,** published in 1905 but probably composed earlier, present the most characteristic musical elements expressive of this temperament. The composer's sympathy for things French, particularly the Symbolist poets, shows in the choice of poems of Maurice Rollinat as his source of inspiration: first, **L'Etang** (The Pond—full of old, blind fish and reeds centuries old—fireflies illuminate more black, sinister swamps but reveal nothing except the frightful noise of consumptive toads—the moon is reflected in this obscure mirror as a skull illuminated from within) and second, **La Cornemuse** (His Bagpipes—played in the wood they sound like the blowing wind—the cry of the deer is never like this voice which resembles the sound of the flute or the oboe blown by a woman—the crucifix at the crossroads—he is dead but always in the depths of my soul I hear, as in the past, his bagpipes). The **Rhapsodies** also show Loeffler's quite individual approach to melody: at times broad and passionate, at others subtle and restrained, never sentimental or trivial. Similarly, his harmonic language suggests an unusual feeling for rich and uncommon combinations of notes contributing to a sense of colour that misleads one into placing Loeffler among the Impressionists. Again, these two pieces show the composer's admirable handling of the instruments, askill no doubt acquired (where the oboe and viola are concerned) as an orchestral violinist in France and America, while his comprehensive knowledge of the resources of the piano is also very apparent.

A very fine craftsman, Loeffler is well represented in more of Gilman's words: "With all his passion for the bizarre and the umbrageous and the grotesque, we are never in doubt as to the essential dignity, the essential purity and nobility, of his sprit."

—Michael Bowie & Susanne Letourneau

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One of Johannes Brahms' well-known characteristics as a creative artist was his unrelenting self-criticism. The trait was so strong, the search for perfection so intense, the idealized goals so specific in his mind that Brahms went to great lengths to support the conclusions forced by that criticism. He destroyed works which he felt to be inferior. He re-set works in different keys or different forms. (In at least one instance, that of the **Trio, Opus 8,** he completely transformed in later life a sprawling but still successful work written in his youth).

The monumental **Quintet in F minor** which closes this season's Explorations Series is a case in point. Originally cast as a string quintet with two cellos, it was re-written as a two-piano sonata, a version occasionally performed today. But Brahms was still not satisfied; the potential for rhythmic power was enhanced but the sustained lyricism of the strings was missing. Thus he re-scored it yet again (in 1864) for piano and string quartet, achieving a synthesis of content and medium which place the work high on anyone's list of masterpieces for this demanding combination. Powerful, wide-ranging, spectacularly effective to listeners, it stands as an example of one of Man's more human attributes—his on-going quest for perfection.

—Lawrence Fisher